



## **Citizen-led assessments and their effects on parents' behavior**

A synthesis of research on Uwezo in comparative perspective

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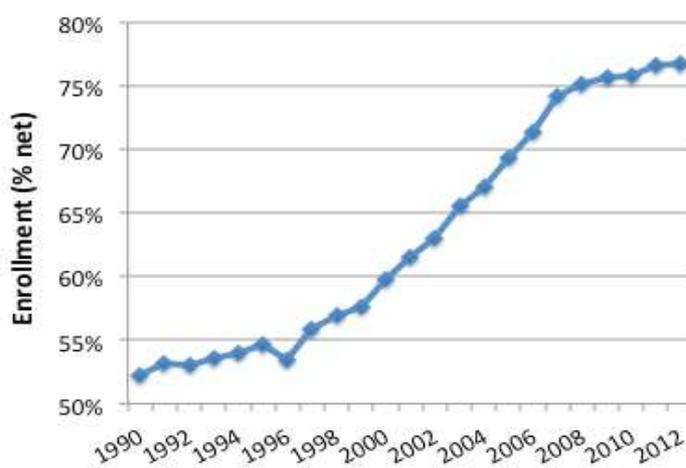
*“Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya,”* (with Daniel Posner and Lily Tsai). World Development (v60, August 2014), pp. 69-38.

## 1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, primary and secondary school enrollment have increased dramatically in many African countries (see Figure 1). These increases stem in part from pressures to achieve education targets within the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All targets.<sup>1</sup> In addition, increased electoral competition has encouraged the leaders of many countries to pursue Universal Primary Education as a way to appeal large numbers of voters.<sup>2</sup>

We are now in a position to ask: has the striking expansion in access to *schooling* led to an increase in *learning*? Many fear this is not be the case.<sup>3</sup> Such concerns have inspired a wave of **citizen-led basic learning assessments**, which intend not just to diagnose the problem of schooling without learning but also to remedy it by providing the public and policymakers with information that will spur action for change.

**Figure 1: Primary School Enrollment in Sub-Saharan Africa**



Data from the World Bank World Development Indicators, low-income countries only.

India provided the model for such assessments with Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), launched in 2005. India had seen a new government come into power in 2004, promising to prioritize learning outcomes. At this time, enrollment levels in India's primary schools exceeded 90%, with the country well on its way towards achieving universal enrollment. However, India lacked national data on learning outcomes to see if children were actually learning. And thus, the idea for ASER was born. Each year ASER collects data on more than 600,000 children, between the age of 5-16, and covers close to 16,000 villages. Volunteers from more than 500 partner organizations participate in the data collection; the resulting 'evidence for action' is then shared widely inside and outside the government at the national, state, district and village levels.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, this model was adapted to the East African context in the form of the **Uwezo** Initiative in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Similar initiatives are underway in Pakistan (since 2009), Mali (2011), Senegal (2012); a pilot has been completed in Mexico, and another is planned for 2015 in Nigeria.

<sup>1</sup> Wedgwood (2007) describes the international community's role in pushing for universal primary education across Africa.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g. Harding and Stasavage (2014).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Pritchett (2013).

<sup>4</sup> For more information on ASER, see <http://www.asercentre.org/>

Despite the enthusiasm for such assessments, we know relatively little about the impact they have on citizen action and learning outcomes. In order to fill this gap, Twaweza commissioned a series of rigorous evaluations of the Uwezo initiative, which we summarize and present here.

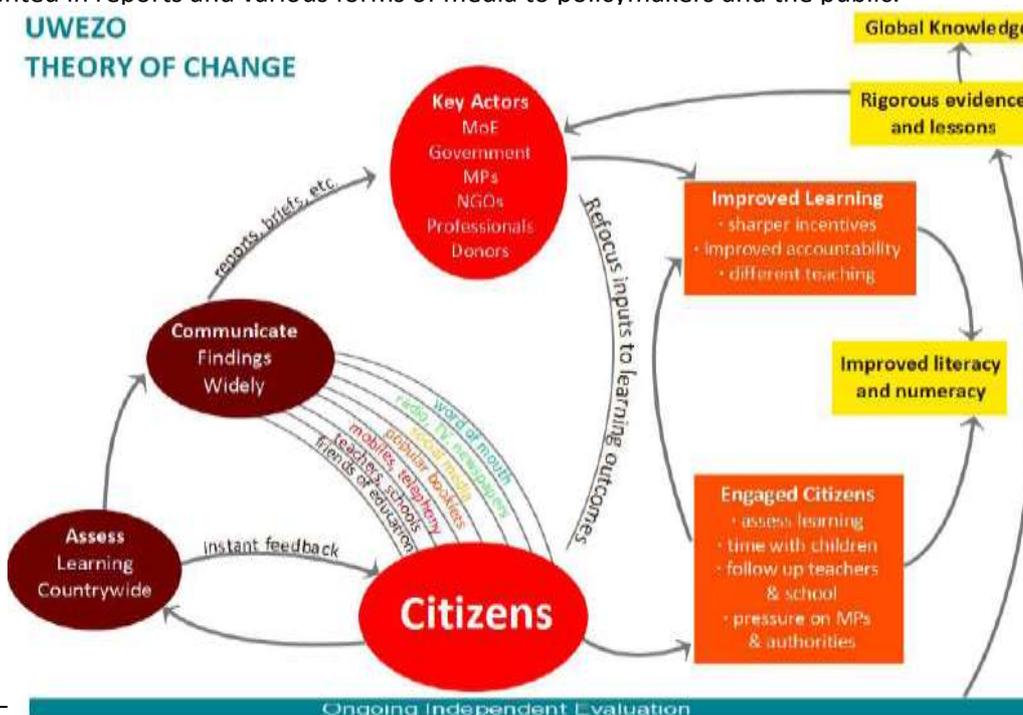
After providing some background on Uwezo, we describe the scope and methods of the evaluations, highlight and interpret key findings, discuss Uwezo’s impact in broader comparative perspective, and conclude with a set of recommendations. We intend not just to present information on Uwezo but also to facilitate discussion around the effectiveness of citizen-led learning assessments and other interventions intended to inspire citizen action to improve public services.

## 2. Background on Uwezo

Uwezo (meaning capability in Kiswahili) is a multi-year initiative that aims to improve competencies in literacy and numeracy among children in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The program was designed to achieve three related goals:

1. Establish actual levels of children’s learning (basic literacy and numeracy);
2. Provide information to the public and to policymakers;
3. Spur practical action amongst parents and other citizens to improve education.

To date, Uwezo assessments have been carried out on a national scale in Kenya every year since 2009, and in Uganda and Tanzania every year since 2010. In each of these countries, the assessment process proceeds as follows: Uwezo volunteers go house to house to administer tests of basic literacy, numeracy, and reading comprehension—in both English and Swahili—to children between the ages of 6 and 16.<sup>5</sup> These tests reflect Standard 2 (the second year of primary school) level learning objectives and were designed in accordance with each country’s national curriculum. Immediately after administering the tests, Uwezo volunteers present parents with their children’s results as well as with materials outlining strategies to improve their children’s learning. Assessment results are then tallied to establish national and sub-national indicators of learning capabilities, and presented in reports and various forms of media to policymakers and the public.



<sup>5</sup> In Uganda the tests were administered in selected local languages instead of Swahili. The tests are administered to children between the ages of 7 and 16 in Tanzania, reflecting the age at which children are required to begin primary school.

Uwezo’s Theory of Change (ToC), depicted in Figure 2 envisages action by citizens at multiple levels – from parents to national leaders.<sup>6</sup> The instant feedback given to parents – i.e., the immediate results on how a child scored on the Uwezo literacy and numeracy test – is central to the ToC, as is the hypothesis that as a result of it, parents will be motivated to take action to improve their children’s learning. While Uwezo communications materials suggest actions to encourage learning (e.g., encouraging parents to check homework, or talking to the teacher about a child’s performance), these are not prescriptive. Rather, parents are thought to know what action is best to take.

In order to test this core hypothesis Twaweza commissioned a team of researchers (Prof. Evan Lieberman, Prof. Daniel Posner, and Prof. Lily Tsai, hereafter “LPT”) to conduct a rigorous assessment of it. Specifically, LPT focused on understanding the direct impact of the literacy/numeracy tests and the immediate follow-up information provided by the Uwezo assessment on parent attitudes and participation in their child’s education. LPT’s evaluation efforts were concentrated in Kenya, given Uwezo’s relatively longer history of implementation in that country. The team conducted a number of different research exercises, including a randomized-controlled trial (RCT), analysis of two rounds of Uwezo household data, and an in-depth qualitative study.

### 3. Scope and Methods of Evaluations

LPT primarily took a randomized control trial (RCT) approach to evaluating Uwezo. Such a research strategy involves comparing outcomes across “treated” and “untreated” groups, where the “treatment” (in this case, the Uwezo intervention) has been randomly assigned. Many scholars – particularly development economists – consider RCTs to be the gold standard in impact evaluation, largely because they allow researchers to compare outcomes following an intervention with a **counterfactual** (what would have happened in the absence of the intervention).<sup>7</sup>

The Uwezo evaluation is not a “pure” RCT, since the researchers (LPT) did not assign research subjects (Kenyan citizens) to “treatment” and “control” groups. Rather, the Uwezo intervention randomly assigned villages to treatment, and selected households at random within treated villages.<sup>8</sup> Hence there was a random component to the design—just not one controlled by the researchers. LPT conducted a “post-treatment” study, comparing outcomes in villages that were part of the Uwezo assessment with outcomes in similar villages that had not been assessed. The evaluation proceeded in two phases and also incorporated significant qualitative elements.

In Phase I (June-August 2011), the research team studied 550 households in 26 villages in two Kenyan districts using extensive household surveys to examine the impact of the 2011 Uwezo assessment.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the survey, the research team also spent two months carrying out in-depth fieldwork in each study village, including interviews with village elders and head teachers, and focus groups with village elites. The researchers analyzed whether, following the administration of the Uwezo test and the reporting of literacy/numeracy results to parents, parents and villagers acted in ways predicted by Uwezo’s Theory of Change. Particular research questions included:

- Do parents of tested children who learn that their children are underperforming take action by moving their children to another type of school?

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<sup>6</sup> This section draws heavily from <http://www.uwezo.net/about-us/theory-of-change/>

<sup>7</sup> Leavy (2014) provides an informative discussion of how useful RCTs are for evaluating transparency and accountability interventions such as Uwezo.

<sup>8</sup> The sample was stratified so that urban and rural villages were sampled proportional to size.

<sup>9</sup> The description of the Uwezo Phase I research draws heavily from the LPT evaluation proposal, available here: <http://twaweza.org/uploads/files/LPT%20Evaluation%20proposal.pdf>

- Are parents in households with tested children more likely to take actions to improve school performance (for example by attending school committee meetings, raising education issues in community discussions or with school committee members, or by monitoring teacher attendance)?
- Do parents of tested children contribute to the functioning and upkeep of the school at higher rates than parents of untested children, or than parents in villages that contain no tested children at all?

To answer these questions, the researchers compared outcomes across three groups: (i) parents of children who received the Uwezo assessment; (ii) parents in “Uwezo villages” (villages or urban areas in which children were given the Uwezo assessment) whose children were not assessed; and (iii) as a control group, parents from villages where there were no Uwezo assessments.

In Phase II, LPT analyzed household and school surveys that were part of the 2013 assessment. This “quasi-experimental design” compared outcomes for communities that were assessed for the first time in 2013 with those that had been assessed in 2012 as well. Since the surveys were conducted after the assessment was administered, having participated in the 2012 assessment can be considered the “treatment” and communities that were assessed for the first time in 2013 served as the control group.

In addition, LPT also conducted extensive “close-range research” in Phase II in order to understand the findings from the quantitative research. From June-August 2013, research teams spent six weeks in school communities in four Kenyan districts conducting interviews and focus groups with parents, teachers, community activists, and local officials. The qualitative work, which involved mapping the production of education and understanding citizen-state relations, helps to interpret the findings from the quantitative evaluations.

#### 4. Key Findings from Quantitative Evaluations

Table 1 summarizes key findings from the quantitative evaluations. We see that in Phase I, the researchers were not able to detect any evidence that Uwezo increased parental involvement or citizen activism. That is, people in assessed households and villages were no more likely to take public actions (attending meetings on education, approaching government officials, taking action to improve their children’s schools), or private actions (helping children with homework or reading, or considering switching schools), than their unassessed counterparts.

**Table 1: Evaluations of whether Uwezo has increased parental involvement**

<i>Time</i>	<i>Scope of Research</i>	<i>Key Findings</i>
<i>Phase I (2011)</i>	Post-treatment field study of 550 households in 26 matched villages in two districts using extensive household surveys	No evidence of increased involvement and citizen activism among parents whose children received the Uwezo assessment.
<i>Phase II (2013)</i>	Post-treatment study of 87,265 households in 4,371 villages surveyed in 2013 Uwezo assessment round. Compared results for communities included in the 2012 assessment with those assessed for the first time in 2013.	Strong effects on respondents’ knowledge of Uwezo and perceptions of impact of programmatic activities.  No evidence Uwezo had impact on outcomes respondents claimed were affected (importance that parents attach to education, parental activism, activism on the part of head teachers, and pupil or teacher attendance)



The results of the Phase II quantitative evaluation are more nuanced but point to a similar lack of impact. On the one hand, researchers found strong effects of the Uwezo intervention on respondents' knowledge of Uwezo and perceptions of the impact of its programmatic activities. Household members in communities that had been included in the prior assessment round were twice as likely to say they had heard or read about Uwezo and twice as likely to say that Uwezo had done something to improve education in their area. Chiefs and village heads in previously assessed communities were also significantly more likely to say they had heard or read about Uwezo and nearly twice as likely to say that they thought Uwezo had done something to improve education in their area. Researchers also found large increases in "treated" communities in the share of parents who said that Uwezo results helped them make new decisions for their children's learning and in the share of head teachers who say that Uwezo results helped them make new decisions for their school.

On the other hand, the Phase II evaluation found no evidence that inclusion in a prior Uwezo assessment round had any impact on the outcomes that respondents claimed were affected. For example, researchers found no difference across "treated" and "control" communities in the importance parents attach to education, in parental or head teacher activism on behalf of improved learning (measured in multiple ways), or in pupil or teacher attendance. Exposure to the Uwezo assessment and informational materials also failed to produce any significant effect on parents' sense of efficacy in the education sphere.

## 5. Emerging Hypotheses to Explain Lack of Impact

How can we understand Uwezo's apparent lack of impact at the household level? This section presents emerging hypotheses relating to the design and implementation of the Uwezo intervention, aspects of the evaluation itself, as well as broader arguments about linkage between information and citizen action.

### *Unrealistic Assumptions?*

Uwezo's Theory of Change holds that as parents and communities become aware of the "crisis" of poor learning outcomes, they "will take concrete steps to improve learning, either through private actions (e.g. pay more attention to homework, follow up with a teacher, pay for a tutor, change schools) or mount collective action."<sup>10</sup> One possible reason for the lack of impact may well be that this core assumption was unrealistic: that is, knowledge about learning outcomes was not, by itself, sufficient to motivate parents to take "concrete steps to improve learning." The LPT evaluations explore and largely confirm this possibility.

#### Barriers to action:

- Widespread norms against unofficial collective action
- Actors at local level say they have little influence over many of the key inputs into education
- Lack of information about government officials' responsibilities
- People tend to look to elites for ideas and action

The close-range research revealed widespread norms against unofficial collective action, and a tendency for people to adhere to hierarchy. The researchers also found that most actors at local

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.uwezo.net/about-us/theory-of-change/>

level say they have little influence over many of the key inputs into education: funding, equipment, and allocation of teachers. In addition, once resources reach the school, the power to make decisions about them seems to rest in the hands of the head teacher.

Citizens report that they generally lack the ability to sanction poorly performing teachers since they tend to have very little information about who is responsible for what in government. Rather, people tend to look to elites for ideas and actions. At the same time, expectations of government responsiveness tend to be low. Such features of Kenyan society seem likely to repress public or collective action to improve learning, even if people are made aware of the “crisis” in public education.

In addition, LPT identify a number of steps that may be necessary to promote citizen action. These are described in further detail below.



### ***Design and Implementation of Uwezo Intervention***

For means of comparability and ease of implementation, all children assessed by Uwezo are tested at the Standard 2 (second year of primary school) level. As a result, the information conveyed to parents in the assessments was, in the majority of instances that their children were performing at grade level. This is because Standard 2-level tests were administered to older pupils, who, while perhaps underperforming at their own grade level could nonetheless complete a Standard 2-level test. Hence the information provided to many parents about their children’s learning may have (erroneously) suggested that the school system was working.

Furthermore, there is some evidence that the instant feedback meant to inform and galvanize parents into action may not have been provided as expected in many cases. Internal monitoring documents from Uwezo-Kenya note that the “quality threshold” for giving instant feedback was not always met. Another internal monitoring report echoed this finding, noting that while volunteers appear to be competent at testing children, they often fail to adequately engage parents in a meaningful way about the results of these tests. The authors of this report suggest that such deficiencies in the provision of instant feedback stem from insufficient time for training, inadequate stipends that hinder recruitment and retention of quality volunteers, and a lack of personnel at the district level to ensure quality data collection.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> R4D evaluation (cite appropriately).

#### Implementation challenges:

- Standard 2 testing for all children
- Instant feedback did not take place as expected in some cases
- Ineffective communication of children's performance on assessments
- Insufficient number of households assessed

The Phase II close-range research also suggests challenges with implementation. When researchers visited parents who were part of 2013 assessment most of them reported that Uwezo had provided them with little or no information. Those who could remember receiving information recalled broad-brush statements such as "Your child is doing very well" or "Your child is doing poorly and needs to get better." This information appears to have been delivered only for children scoring at the extreme, perhaps because volunteers had a hard time deciding what scores towards the middle of the distribution actually meant, or how to present them.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, both the Phase I and Phase II quantitative evaluations suggest that the number of households treated in each village may have been too small to achieve the expected impact. The Phase I evaluation found that the number of households in which the assessment was actually carried out in each "treated" village was far below the target of 20 per village: on average, only 12 households were assessed. The Phase II quantitative evaluation makes the additional point that the number of households assessed per village may have been too small to achieve the spillover effects assumed by Uwezo's Theory of Change. That is, even if all 20 households were assessed, most villages contain around 100 households. Thus, the majority of households in the average "Uwezo village" was not part of the assessment and may not have been aware of it. Such conditions seem likely to hinder widespread awareness and collective action.

#### **Aspects of Evaluation**

Following the presentation of key findings, the Phase I evaluation turns a critical eye towards the design of their own evaluation as one way of understanding Uwezo's apparent lack of impact. The researchers note the possibility that their analysis was "underpowered" – that is, the sample size may have been too small to pick up an effect. While the study's sample size should have been sufficiently large to identify treatment effects of the magnitude the researchers expected, they allow that a larger sample size would have enabled them to pick up smaller effect sizes. The researchers also suggest that inadequate time may have lapsed between the Uwezo assessment and their measurement of its impact, noting that three months may have been too little time for the processes related to behavioral change to work themselves through. On the other hand, they venture that the impact of the intervention may have been extremely short-lived, in which case three months was too *long* an interval.

Finally, the Phase II close-range research suggests that some of the indicators used to measure citizen action may have been inappropriate. For instance, this phase of the research found that school management committees (SMCs) essentially appear to be tools used by head teachers for securing compliance from parents. Head teachers and SMCs convene parent meetings in order to apply social pressure on parents to contribute or mete out sanctions for their failure to do so. As a result, the authors conclude that attendance and participation in parent meetings is not good indicator of parent mobilization on behalf of improved learning.

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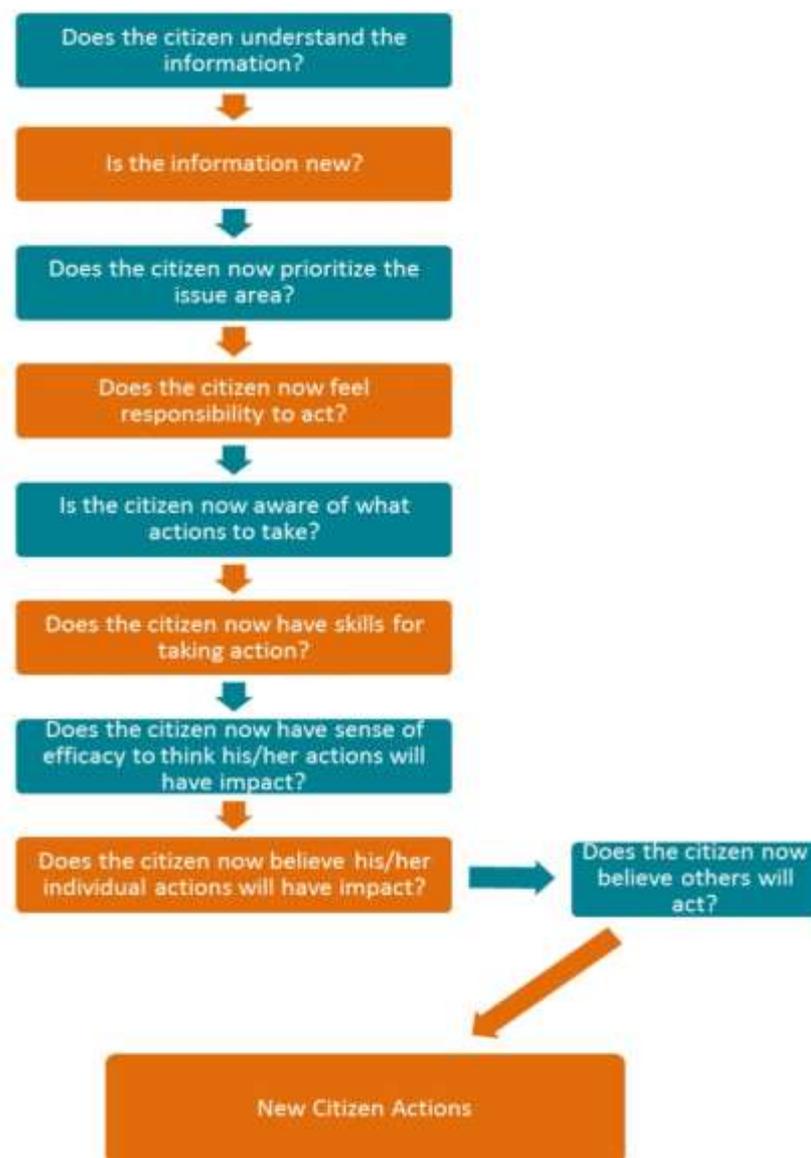
<sup>12</sup> Lieberman et al., 2014d

That being said, both the Phase I and Phase II evaluations included a range of indicators beyond this potentially controversial one. As LPT further note in the Phase I report, “Given our ‘clean’ matched-village design, along with the confirmation provided by our subsequent qualitative fieldwork, we do not believe that we have missed a causal effect that actually exists” (p. 77).

Weakness of evaluation?

- Possible that study’s sample size was too small to pick up an effect
- Potentially inappropriate measures of citizen action
- Likely not driving finding of null effect

Figure 3: LPT Information-Citizen Action Causal Chain



### **Link between Information and Citizen Action**

Given their confidence in the evaluation design, the LPT team suggests that Uwezo’s apparent lack of impact was largely due to the absence of key conditions that are necessary for an informational intervention to generate citizen activism. The researchers develop a systematic framework to articulate these conditions, hereafter the **LPT Information-Citizen Action Causal Chain**, reproduced in Figure 3.<sup>13</sup> The framework intends not just to explain Uwezo’s lack of impact but also to guide the design of more successful informational interventions and to better how, why, and under what conditions information might affect citizen action.

In the Phase I evaluation, the LPT research team assesses the Uwezo initiative from the point of view of this chain. Beginning with the first question (**“Does the citizen understand the information?”**), they do not believe that a lack of understanding was the source of their null findings. However, the second condition (**“Is the information new?”**) was largely unmet. Among parents who could remember their children’s assessment results, 60% reported that their children’s scores were about what they expected. (As noted above, this may reflect the fact that older children might have been underperforming at their own grade level but could still pass a Standard 2 test.) Parents seemed fairly well informed about school performance in general. Moving to the third condition (**“Does the citizen now prioritize the issue area?”**) they find that many parents do value education, but not significantly more than other public goods such as health care and drinking water infrastructure. As for the fourth condition (**“Does the citizen now feel responsibility to act?”**), only six percent of respondents in their study reported that parents were most responsible for making sure that teachers come to school and teach the children. The fifth condition (**“Is the citizen now aware of what actions to take?”**) appears to have been particularly salient: When asked whether they knew what action to take when addressing problems with their child’s school, the vast majority of parents in our study—72%—said they would not know, or would not know how to figure out, what specific actions to take. The sixth condition (**“Does the citizen now have skills for taking action?”**) was also a likely barrier, as skills such as contacting a public official appeared to be lacking in the study population. As for the seventh condition (**“Does the citizen now have sense of efficacy to think his/her actions will have impact?”**) parents in sample displayed a reasonable level of internal efficacy or confidence in their ability to affect their environment, but expressed significant reservations about their external efficacy (i.e., the government’s trustworthiness and capacity to respond to their demands). As for the final condition (**“Does citizen now believe others will act?”**), the researchers do not find evidence to suggest that collective action is a significant constraint.

This phase of the research found that citizens do not feel personal responsibility to act in a public or collective manner. Rather, the actions for which parents feel they have responsibility fall into two main categories: (i) supporting their children’s learning with actions at home, and (ii) paying the fees that the school says are necessary to cover materials and inputs not covered by government funding.

## **6. Uwezo in Comparative Perspective**

### **Informational Interventions**

Uwezo is one of many informational interventions meant to engender citizen action. Overall, the track record for such interventions is mixed. However, researchers are beginning to identify the conditions under which information can be expected to promote citizen action, and ultimately improve public service delivery, building on LPT’s interpretation of Uwezo’s lack of impact. For instance, researchers have found that information may be more likely to lead to citizen action, and can be expected to lead to a state response if it is *credible*. In addition, it is often more

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<sup>13</sup> Figure 3 in Lieberman et al. (2014).

actionable if it is *comparative* rather than related to unrealistic government standards. Finally, information should also have an *inspirational* effect (Joshi, 2014).

Beyond the nature of information provided, citizen action may usefully be broken down into several elements: demanding information, generating information, monitoring, seeking accountability, and seeking grievance redress. Which actions are actually undertaken depends upon factors including the extent to which communities are mobilized, past experience of interactions with the state, and their expectations about government responsiveness (Joshi, 2014).

#### Emerging Lessons:

- Information is more likely to be actionable when it is credible, comparative, and has an inspirational effect.
- Interventions are more likely to be successful when they provide information that is salient, that illuminates problems with inputs, and that recommends a clear course of action to improve those problems.
- Success derives from employing multiple tactics –encouraging enabling environments for collective action and coordinating citizen voice initiatives with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness.

Scholars have also shown that context matters. Kosack and Fung (2014) have developed a framework for understanding the pathways from transparency to improved public services, based on three components: an “Action Cycle” through which information becomes useful, “short” vs. “long” routes to accountability, and confrontational vs. collaborative strategies of citizen action.

The authors put these three components together to identify “five worlds of service delivery,” which entail different approaches and challenges, and classify 16 recent experimental transparency and accountability interventions into these categories. The Uwezo intervention is classified under “World 3: Unwilling providers (Contestation + short route),” where “the goal of [transparency and accountability] interventions... is to make it more difficult for providers to ignore the costs of their underperformance and thus induce them to improve. Users face barriers of collective action and front-line resistance, and success requires overcoming these barriers to shift the balance of power between citizens and providers” (p. 80). Kosack and Fung find that the 10 interventions classified in this world had a mixed record: six were successful and four were not.

They conclude that, “... interventions are more likely to be successful when... they provide information that is clearly understandable and salient to citizens (e.g., by showing problems with inputs clearly related to the performance of their providers, and how this performance stacks up against their neighbors’ or against their rights to service); that illuminates problems with the inputs into services, not simply with the performance of the service, which may have myriad causes; and that implies or directly recommends a clear course of action to improve those problems.” (p. 83)

A final meta-analysis that sheds light on Uwezo’s lack of impact is Jonathan Fox’s (2014) review of 25 quantitative evaluations of social accountability initiatives (including the LPT Phase I quantitative evaluation). Fox describes the initiatives as taking either “tactical” or “strategic” approaches. He defines tactical approaches as bounded interventions (tools) limited to “society-side” efforts to project voice.

Such approaches assume that information alone will motivate localized collective action, which will in turn generate sufficient power to influence public sector performance. Strategic approaches, on the other hand, deploy multiple tactics, encourage enabling environments for collective action for

accountability and coordinate citizen voice initiatives with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness. Fox concludes that the results of tactical approaches (including Uwezo) are mixed, whereas strategic approaches have been much more successful. One key weakness of tactical approaches is the unrealistic assumption that “people who have been denied voice and lack power will perceive vocal participation as having more benefits than costs (if the costs are recognized at all)” (p. 22). Such costs – what Fox calls the “fear factor” – likely factored into the calculations of many households included in the Uwezo assessment. As noted by the close-range research, fear plays a key role in deterring collective action for many Kenyan citizens.

Rather than taking collective action, the close-range research found that parents were much more likely to report taking individual action, meant to benefit at own children. Indeed, parents typically thought of “taking action” as contributing more of their own money/labor to children’s schools. The types of action parents report taking include those taken within the home for the benefit of their own children (helping with homework, transferring children to better schools), actions taken outside of the home for the benefit of their own children (talking to teachers, attending SMC meetings), and actions that may benefit both their own children and others (providing labor to improve school environment, financing infrastructure improvements). The close-range research also found that parents concerned about the quality of government primary schools largely did not elect to exercise “voice” by taking action to pressure schools or government for better education provision, but rather almost always chose the “exit” option of moving their to private schools if they had the means to do so.

### **Citizen-led Basic Learning Assessments**

As noted in the introduction to this report, Uwezo is one of a growing number of citizen-led basic learning assessments, which to date have not been rigorously evaluated. One exception is a 2010 study by Banerjee and co-authors, which looks at the impact of ASER-type assessments in Uttar Pradesh, India’s most populous state. The authors study the impact of administering citizen-led assessments, the results of which are used to create community report cards, which are then presented at village-wide meetings. The study finds that this intervention served to make people more aware of the status of education in their village. However, it did not increase parents’ involvement with the public school system, and, correspondingly, there were no changes in school resources, nor any measurable impact on learning. Only when the assessment was coupled with the provision of trained volunteers to hold reading camps for children after school was there any noticeable impact on learning. The authors interpret their results to suggest that information is more likely to engender improved outcomes when combined with the offer of a direct channel of action.

In a promising move to fill the evidence gap on the impact of citizen-led learning assessments, R4D and the Hewlett Foundation are currently conducting an evaluation of four citizen-led assessments – ASER, Uwezo, and similar interventions in Mali (*Beekunko*) and Senegal (*Jangandoo*). While the LPT-led evaluations focused on the impact of providing instant feedback to parents, the R4D/Hewlett study has a broader mandate. It combines a process evaluation (assessing the extent to which Uwezo was executed effectively) with an evaluation of impact (investigating the extent to which Uwezo increased awareness and spurred action, at the community level as well as at the district and national levels, and the international sphere). The R4D/Hewlett research echoes many of the findings described above – in particular the challenges associated with implementation at the community level and spurring action among parents. At the same time, the R4D/Hewlett researchers note that Uwezo has led to increased debate and some commitments to action on the part of national policymakers.

## 7. Conclusion and Suggested Next Steps

Independent, citizen-led learning assessments have provided important evidence that schooling, in many cases, doesn't lead to learning. In addition, these assessments embody the hope – and hypotheses – that by collecting such evidence and presenting it to key stakeholders (from parents, to teachers, to policy makers), these actors will be spurred into taking action to improve learning outcomes. It is imperative that these hypotheses are rigorously tested – after all, the tremendous resources, human and financial, that go into these assessments ought to yield positive results. This paper has summarized a set of evaluative studies undertaken around the Uwezo citizen learning assessment in East Africa; the synthesis suggests that Uwezo has to an extent failed to live up to its promise of galvanizing parents into action.

As summarized in this paper, parents whose children Uwezo has assessed, or who reside in communities where Uwezo assessments have taken place, are no more likely than their non-assessed counterparts to take public or private action to improve learning outcomes. On the other hand, there is qualitative evidence that the collection and public dissemination of Uwezo data over the past five years has, in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda, significantly contributed to shifting the public dialogue on education from inputs and enrollment to learning, and highlighted the learning crisis in these countries. The lack of impact at household level may be disheartening at first, but taking these important findings on board and making use of them is the only way to keep improving the learning assessments and amplifying their impact. The evaluations of Uwezo and other informational interventions summarized herein provide a number of suggestions about next steps to improve the Uwezo's design and implementation, as well as future evaluations of its impact.

### Next Steps:

1. Improve implementation at community level
2. Test links in the information-action chain
3. Link results to suggested actions
4. Target dissemination to engaged groups

### **1. Improve implementation at community level**

Citizen-led learning assessments center on the hypothesis that providing information at the community level about children's learning will motivate parents and other community members to take action to improve it. The evaluations summarized here demonstrate the difficulties of testing this hypothesis, given considerable challenges in communicating assessment results to parents and community members. Uwezo's extensive internal monitoring and the R4D/Hewlett study help identify a number of suggestions to improve implementation at the community level. These include enhancing and improving training for Uwezo coordinators and volunteers; exploring different ways of explaining and introducing Uwezo; and improving the delivery of instant feedback at household level.

Improving the delivery of instant feedback seems particularly important. The close-range research suggests that information is best delivered face-to-face or in a meeting. People tend to be lukewarm about getting information through radio and very discouraging about delivery through SMS.<sup>14</sup> That said, such attitudes may be changing among younger people who increasingly access more information through social media.

The R4D/Hewlett assessment suggests reducing the frequency of the Uwezo assessment as one possible strategy for improving implementation – the idea being that if the assessment were not

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<sup>14</sup> Lieberman et al., 2014d.

being conducted every year there would be more resources available for training and mobilizing people at the local level to take action on the results. Refining and improving logistical coordination might also help to achieve this goal.

## **2. Test links in the information-action chain**

Even if community-level implementation were to occur seamlessly, with all parents of assessed children informed about their children's learning abilities in a consistent and detailed manner, the evaluations summarized here suggest that action might not follow. LPT's Information – Citizen Action Causal Chain identifies a number of potential barriers that must be overcome before the provision of information will lead to action. While arguably intuitive, researchers and development practitioners have yet to generate strong evidence on the relative importance of the different links in the chain.

Future evaluations of and extensions to Uwezo and other citizen-led learning assessments might experiment with testing the various assumptions contained in these different links. Specific interventions might include coupling assessment results with messages to promote feelings of responsibility for action, or a sense of efficacy that people's actions will have an impact. Researchers could experimentally test the impact of these "add-ons" compared with simply providing information on children's learning abilities.

## **3. Link dissemination of results to suggested actions**

The LPT Information-Citizen Action Causal Chain also suggests that information may fail to have an impact on citizen action when people lack awareness of specific actions to take. Uwezo might therefore consider providing suggestions of specific actions to improve learning at the same time that assessment results are disseminated. This is in line with the suggestion emanating from Banerjee et al.'s (2010) evaluation of ASER, that information is more likely to result in collective action and improve outcomes when combined with the offer of a direct channel of action. Potential channels might include the formation of community groups to help children with their schoolwork.

LPT's close-range research provides an array of specific suggestions that could also serve to make Uwezo more strategic and provide such channels. These include: campaigning for additional teachers, mobilizing head teachers (who can then pressure other actors), and mobilizing parents to pressure for relevant streams of funding or to register complaints through official but little known avenues.

## **4. Target dissemination to more engaged groups**

The evaluations summarized above call into question Uwezo's focus on parents as the primary audience for assessment results at the community level. Future iterations of Uwezo and other citizen-led assessments might therefore consider targeting dissemination to more engaged groups – such as teachers, local leaders, and community-based organizations. The R4D/Hewlett study recommends experimenting with different ways of using volunteers and other implementing partners beyond the assessment period, as a means of promoting not only individual action but also collective action for self-help (such as organizing a community tutoring program) or accountability (mobilizing to demand accountability from district officials). Such a recommendation is in keeping with Fox's (2014) recommendation that social accountability interventions "draw on the concept of 'targeted transparency,' which focuses specifically on accessible information that is *perceived* as useful and actionable by stakeholders, which can be integrated into their routines" (p. 26).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> For an expanded discussion of 'targeted transparency,' see Fung, Graham and Weil (2007).

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